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ABSTRACT

Inclusionary schools occur through purposeful leadership, and the principal is the key to lead others through the process of change. This pilot study surveyed 155 principals of small rural schools in Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming to gather information about the ways in which principals administer special education programs in their buildings. The principals responded to a 42-item survey questionnaire on a 5-point scale. The questions assessed the extent of the principal's involvement in various administrative, evaluative, and supportive tasks related to special education. Four tables break down the administrative positions of participants, position by highest degree, position by number of special education courses completed, and percentage of time spent in selected activities. A final table presents number of responses, mean score, and standard deviation for each questionnaire item. Results indicate that these principals are incorporating learners with disabilities within the leadership functions listed. The complete questionnaire is included. (SAS)

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Who's in Charge Here? Leadership in Rural Special Education

Schools continue to place learners with disabilities in the general education classroom and provide special education services in that environment. This trend developed from shifts in both general and special education. Both promote the provision of an individualized education to all learners, including those with disabilities in the typical classroom environment. Principals are integral in making this and other change work. Effective schools research reveals the importance of leadership at the local school level (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, & Usdan, 1990). Furthermore, recent legislation and litigation continue to place more responsibility on the principal. This is particularly true in special education.

Principals are the keys to make special education succeed or fail (Smith, & Colon, 1998). This and other site level responsibilities challenge the constantly increasing role of the school administrator (Williams, & Katsiyannis, 1998). How can principals demonstrate leadership in this area? What do principals currently do? The results of a survey examine these responsibilities and the principal's role in special education leadership.

Method

The subjects for this pilot study were principals of small rural schools of Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Each respondent completed a survey developed and sent by the investigators. If subjects failed to return the survey, the principals received a follow-up letter and survey. The subjects returned the survey and the investigators analyzed the obtained data. In addition to a number of demographic queries, the investigators asked respondents to pen their agreement or disagreement to indicators of special education leadership roles (Billingsley, Farley, & Rude, 1993). Response statements on the survey included:

	Response Statement
S1.	I communicate to building level staff that the education of learners with disabilities is a shared responsibility.
S2.	I provide clear direction and support to faculty and staff regarding the philosophy, goals, and expectations for providing instruction and services to learners with disabilities.
S3.	I provide opportunities for meaningful parent and family involvement in the education of learners with disabilities.
S4.	I facilitate the coordination of programs and services between school staff and community and interagency groups.
S5.	I encourage all who are involved with the learner with disabilities to actively participate in the IEP process.

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S6.	I provide assistance in IEP development, implementation, and evaluation.
S7.	I assist with curriculum development and/or modification.
S8.	I assist with identifying appropriate instructional strategies and resources.
S9.	I help organize and arrange space/materials for modifying instruction.
S10.	I help translate individual learner objectives into daily lesson plans.
S11.	I encourage the use of various innovations to improve instruction, including technology.
S12.	I provide ongoing support for and assistance with inclusion efforts.
S13.	I encourage students with disabilities to participate in all school activities.
S14.	I assist with developing and implementing classroom interventions to help at-risk students.
S15.	I assess the existing behavior management system and makes changes based on student needs and current educational programs.
S16.	I foster the development of positive, responsible student behavior.
S17.	I guide school personnel in implementing behavior management strategies to produce more supportive, instructional, and preventative behavior management programs.
S18.	I plan and implement transition services for students (e.g., from pre-school to elementary, from elementary to middle school, from secondary schools to world or work, post-secondary education).
S19.	I plan and deliver goals, objectives, instruction, and related services within an outcome-oriented process.
S20.	I involve students in transition planning.
S21.	I promote collaboration among transition service providers within the school and with outside agencies.
S22.	I assist in developing strategies for including a transition component into the student's IEP (individualized education program).
S23.	I ensure that students with disabilities receive high-quality transition planning and transition services that meet their individual needs and interests.
S24.	I help teachers interpret and use assessment data that measure progress toward curricular goals and objectives (curriculum-based assessment).
S25.	I provide frequent monitoring of students' progress.
S26.	I involve teachers in evaluating the effectiveness of special programs.
S27.	I use evaluation results to make informed program decisions.
S28.	I provide opportunities for collaborative planning of staff development activities.
S29.	I evaluate the usefulness of information or skills presented in staff development sessions.
S30.	I provide opportunities to apply, practice, and reflect on skills presented in staff development sessions.
S31.	I encourage teacher involvement in activities for professional growth.
S32.	I provide incentives to encourage personal and professional growth.
S33.	I provide ongoing support and assistance to beginning teachers.
S34.	I acknowledge teachers' and other staff members' efforts.
S35.	I communicate confidence and respect for teachers and all other staff.
S36.	I encourage shared decision making in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs for students with disabilities.
S37.	I provide opportunities for regular and special teachers to observe students taught by each other.
S38.	I provide opportunities for teachers and related services personnel to learn, solve problems, and interact in small groups or teams.
S39.	I evaluate and modify school-based consultation programs.
S40.	I schedule frequent observations for improving instructional effectiveness.
S41.	I schedule conferences following observations to analyze and discuss instruction.
S42.	I evaluate teachers using clearly defined criteria.

Adapted from Billingsley, Farley, & Rude (1993)

Results

One hundred fifty-five administrators responded to this questionnaire. The total number of responses to any given item rarely equaled 155. It was not unusual for an occasional item to be unanswered. Although all respondents were principals of rural schools, Table 1 highlights their assigned primary duties.

Table 1
Administrative Positions of Participants

Administrative Position	Frequency	Percent
Elementary	60	40.3
Secondary	44	29.5
Combined Elementary Secondary	13	8.7
Central Office	4	2.7
Other	28	18.8
Total	149	100.0

Thirty-seven (25%) respondents reported "yes" when asked if they were principal for more than one attendance center, while 111 (75%) responded "no." The respondents were a diverse group of people. Table 2 shows the wide variety of background and training of each. There

Table 2
Administrative Position by Highest Degree

Administrative Position	Bachelors	Masters	Specialist	Doctoral	Other	Total
Elementary	6	18	6	5	20	55
Secondary	15	14	4	4	4	41
Combined Elementary Secondary	1	5	3	1	2	12
Central Office	1	3	4	-	-	-
Other	8	6	4	2	8	28
Total	31	46	17	12	34	140

were 42 females (28.2%)and 107 males (71.8%). Their ages ranged from 28 to 75 years, with an average of 45 years. There was a wide range in terms of years of professional experience; the average was 22.4 years, with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 42. They also worked in schools with a wide range of student population. Table 3 identifies the background in special education of the responding principals. Rural school populations ranged from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 950; the average was 284. One demographic item addressed

Table 3
Position and Number of Special Education Courses Completed

Administrative Position	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Total
Elementary	6	18	6	5	20	57
Secondary	15	14	4	4	4	41
Combined Elementary Secondary	1	5	3	1	2	12
Central Office	1	3				4
Other	8	6	4	2	8	28
Total	31	46	17	12	34	142

attendance centers. When asked, "What percentage of time is spent on regular education tasks and special education tasks?" the respondents indicated that an average of 79% (range: 15 to 98) of their time was spent of regular education and 21% (range: 2-85) was spent on special education. Of that time, the responding principals dispersed their time in a variety of ways as seen in Table 4. It should be noted that because of the number of activities and the large number

Table 4
Percent of Time in Selected Activities

Activity	N	% of time
Program Development	142	13.0
Personnel Issues	143	16.5
School Management/Budget	142	20.5
Student Activities	140	12.5
District Office	137	8.5
Community	134	5.3
Planning	139	6.2
Professional Development	141	6.2
Student Behavior Management	145	14.6

of participants reporting, the total amount of time exceeds 100%. The principals responded to each questionnaire using a Likert-type scale. A response of 1 equated to strongly agree, 3 was neutral, and 5 indicated strongly disagree. Table 5 highlights the mean responses of the principals to each statement.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to gather information about the ways in which principals administer special education programs in their building. The investigators found the rural principals who responded incorporated learners with disabilities within the listed leadership functions. To make special education and affected students part of a unified educational system, the principal needs to communicate this mission, manage curriculum and instruction, supervise both regular and special teaching, monitor all students' progress, and promote a positive and accepting instructional climate (Krug, 1993). To respond to this increasingly diverse student

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for Questionnaire Items

Item Number	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
S1	153	1.00	5.00	1.8758	1.0280
S2	153	1.00	5.00	2.2092	0.9911
S3	153	1.00	5.00	2.4248	1.0368
S4	150	1.00	5.00	2.8333	1.0582
S5	153	1.00	5.00	1.9477	1.1573
S6	153	1.00	5.00	2.2680	1.0761
S7	152	1.00	5.00	2.4539	1.0411
S8	151	1.00	5.00	2.6556	1.0003
S9	153	1.00	5.00	2.5490	1.0256
S10	148	1.00	5.00	3.5676	1.0952
S11	153	1.00	5.00	2.2157	1.0447
S12	153	1.00	5.00	2.1765	1.1009
S13	153	1.00	5.00	2.0065	1.0791
S14	152	1.00	5.00	2.4013	0.9368
S15	150	1.00	5.00	2.4467	0.9521
S16	152	1.00	5.00	1.8816	1.0792
S17	150	1.00	5.00	2.2067	1.0252
S18	149	1.00	5.00	2.8792	1.0261
S19	148	1.00	5.00	3.0676	0.9452
S20	147	1.00	5.00	3.0340	1.0880
S21	147	1.00	5.00	2.7551	1.0637
S22	148	1.00	5.00	2.8986	1.0416
S23	145	1.00	5.00	2.6414	1.0184
S24	147	1.00	5.00	2.8163	1.0855
S25	149	1.00	5.00	2.6309	1.0613
S26	148	1.00	5.00	2.4122	0.9471
S27	147	1.00	5.00	2.4218	0.8984
S28	150	1.00	5.00	2.3600	0.9069
S29	148	1.00	5.00	2.5270	0.8366
S30	148	1.00	5.00	2.5405	0.8196
S31	154	1.00	5.00	1.9091	1.1047
S32	149	1.00	5.00	2.3557	1.1215
S33	153	1.00	5.00	2.0000	1.0131
S34	150	1.00	5.00	1.9133	1.0802
S35	152	1.00	5.00	1.8158	1.0637
S36	153	1.00	5.00	1.9804	0.9765
S37	150	1.00	5.00	2.5867	1.0503
S38	150	1.00	5.00	2.4800	0.9812
S39	141	1.00	5.00	3.0426	0.9552
S40	150	1.00	5.00	2.5667	1.0194
S41	151	1.00	5.00	2.2053	1.0540
S42	151	1.00	5.00	2.0331	1.0094

population, principals need to facilitate collaborative planning and problem-solving between general and special education professionals, and family members (Williams, & Katsiyannis, 1998). Inclusionary schools occur through purposeful leadership and the principal is the key to lead others through this process of change (Parker, & Day, 1997). Integrating special education in the total school community is difficult. Johnson (1998) provides guidelines for evaluating principals who share special education program management and leadership responsibilities. These 16 tasks and 37 competencies offer principals an outline to evaluate their responsibilities. Barriers are many and include administrative constraints, teacher preparation, funding patterns, and governmental regulations. In rural communities, additional barriers involve resistance to change, economic challenges, and geographic challenges. The administrator who sees special education as an opportunity will have fewer problems and a high rate of success (Smith, & Colon, 1998). Based on the obtained results, principals in Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming are facilitating this change. Although the results focus on these states, results are readily generalizable to other western states and other rural settings.

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